

1 Samuel 16:1-13

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[0 : 00] I want this evening to follow the same theme as we started this morning, and that is, of course, the beginning of the vacancy of this congregation.

This morning we looked at some of the qualities that we ought to be looking for in a prospective minister to fill the vacancy.

Tonight I want to look at the same thing from a slightly different perspective, and that's because at the same time as we need to be looking to identify the qualities of a prospective minister, we ought at the same time to remember that this is God's choice.

It's not just our choice. It is actually God's and ours. We pray that He will move in us to recognize the next minister, but we also have to leave the choice to Him.

We have to pray. We have to believe that the Holy Spirit is working in this process to identify for us who His servant is going to be.

[1 : 18] And this chapter here, I know it's about the choice of a king, and so the analogy breaks down, of course, between a king and a minister. A minister is not a king. And yet there are certain features of this chapter which I believe do have relevance to where we are this evening.

And I can think of seven of them, and I'm just going to mention these seven very, very briefly. You know the story, of course, the first king of Israel had failed, and God was now focusing His attention on another man, an obscure figure, someone who was out of sight.

Nobody knew him apart from his father and his brothers. He was in the back of beyond looking after his father's sheep. And yet he was the very young man that God had in his sights to be king of Israel.

And he was to be this time, in contrast to Saul, a man after God's own heart. Seven things then, seven features, seven principles, if you like, that help us, I hope, to understand how God works in similar situations.

Number one is this. God overcomes failure. That's the first thing that strikes me about this chapter. God overcomes. And I see this in several different ways.

[2 : 50] First of all, I see it nationally in Israel. Remember the first chapter that we read, 1 Samuel chapter 8, which tells us about how Israel gathered together and they had rejected Samuel's sons, quite rightly so.

Samuel's sons were a big disappointment. They did not follow Samuel. For whatever reason, they didn't follow Samuel. And so, it was a dead loss suggesting that they should replace him in some way.

But the people went further than that. Instead of asking God for his choice of a king, for his choice of leadership, if you like, they said, no, we want a king.

We want specifically a king to reign over us. But it's not because God wanted it. It's because they saw other nations. They wanted to be like other nations.

They looked around it. They compared themselves to the grandeur of the monarchies of other nations. And they wanted to be like them.

- [3 : 55] And that's where they went wrong. Instead of committing themselves to God and asking, well, what do you want in all of this? They decided themselves how to proceed. But God did something quite marvelous.
- He did something on two levels. On one level, he told them, made it quite clear to them, that their motives were sinful and selfish.
- And they were. And yet, despite that, the marvelous thing is, by his grace, he transformed their wrong motives into his plan for the kingdom.
- And of anything that they had asked sinfully, he took and he created into a paradigm, if you like, a framework, a monarchy that would last for many, many years from then on.
- And so God overcame the failure and the sinfulness of Israel by taking what they had asked for sinfully and wrongfully and transforming it into something good.
- [5 : 04] In actual fact, it was always God's plan that one day they would have a monarchy. But the motives of the people in which they came asking for it were all wrong.
- And they had to be shown that and demonstrated that themselves. There's another level on which God overcomes apparent failure. Samuel was now at the end of his ministry.
- He'd be one of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament. But he must have felt something of a failure. For one thing, his sons didn't walk in his ways. And that must have really disappointed him.
- But then for another, look at what had happened. He had obeyed God at every turn. He had anointed Saul as king. And now Saul had failed. What was he now going to do?
- What was God going to do now with the kingdom? Well, Samuel still had work to do because God overcomes our failures. And I say this because we're all failures from one extent to another.
- [6 : 08] We all know what it's like to fail in our consistency and in our obedience to the Lord. As we come tonight confessing our failures once again, we come to a God who is gracious and who's able to transform our losses into his gain.
- And that's the marvel of grace. And we see it even here in the Old Testament. God overcomes our failure. Second thing I see is that God overcomes danger.
- There was real danger. Samuel recognized it. Saul was an incredibly jealous, unpredictable guy. He was something of a psychopath, I think. Saul was ready to kill rather than have anyone replace him as king.
- It was one of the problems, of course, with monarchy, that power went to their head. And absolute power corrupts. And that's exactly what happened with Saul.
- Even though he knew that God had rejected him, was going to take the kingdom from him, he wouldn't accept that. And he was ready to kill anyone who threatened his authority. And so Samuel was in real danger.
- [7 : 19] If anybody had told Saul what Samuel was doing in finding a replacement for him, Saul would have unleashed all his forces and he would have attacked Bethlehem and the house of David.
- So when Samuel said he was afraid, he meant it. And like so many places in the Old Testament and the New Testament, what we're looking at here is not just a psychopathic king.
- It's not just someone who is incredibly jealous and is ready to kill in order to stop someone replacing him. What you're looking at here is a spiritual warfare.
- An enemy that wants to destroy God's people and destroy God's plan. And trust me, the same is true today.

We still have an enemy. The Bible, the New Testament talks about an enemy just the same as the Old Testament. What is it that the apostle says that we have an enemy who goes about like a roaring lion seeking who may devour.

[8 : 25] And that's not just individually but collectively as well. So please beware of that during the vacancy. The devil is never far away and he wants to destroy God's plan to fill the vacancy in his own way.

Yet God overcomes that danger. Just make sure that you're not part of the danger. The real tragedy here was not that the danger came from the Philistines or the Moabites or the Midianites.

That's where you would expect the threat to come from. The real tragedy here was that the danger came from within God's people. His covenant people. People who should have known better like Saul.

And yet he had gone so far astray and become so warped in his thinking. He had allowed the power to get to his head to the extent where he was ready to stand against the purposes and the plans of God.

And that's what happens when we put our own selfishness and our own sinfulness in front of God's plan. You actually end up opposing God. God forbid that any one of us here tonight should ever find ourselves in the position where we're opposing God.

[9 : 38] And it can happen very, very easily. Just make sure it doesn't happen. Just stay close to him. Stay close to the Lord. God overcomes danger.

And then the third thing that strikes me about this chapter is that God's plans come through worship. Worship. Samuel said, how can I go?

If Saul hears about it, he'll kill me. The Lord said, take a heifer with you and say, I've come to sacrifice to the Lord. Invite Jesse to the sacrifice and I will show you what to do. So what's happening here is that in order to overcome the danger and the threat from Saul, God says to Samuel, right, we will create a situation where there is sacrifice.

That's how they used to worship in the Old Testament. But the sacrifice was not just a smoke screen. They weren't just pretending to worship. They really were calling people together to offer sacrifice to the Lord.

This was a genuine, real, authentic worship occasion. And that is very often how God works. And that's very often how God's plans come to pass.

[10 : 52] You'll find that in several places in the Bible, in the Old Testament and the New Testament. For example, remember in the Acts of the Apostles, it was when Peter and John went to pray in the temple.

That they met the lame man lying on the roadside or lying at the temple gate. And all of a sudden, a miracle happened through Peter and John.

God healed the man. God chose to act at that moment when they were on their way to worship. Remember in Acts chapter 10, where Peter is on the rooftop.

And what's he doing? He's praying. He's worshipping. And that's the moment when God chooses to reveal something fundamentally important about what he is doing to cross the threshold between Jew and Gentile.

The gospel was going to go over the Jewish threshold to the Gentiles. That was a momentous occasion in the life of Peter. When did it happen?

[11 : 55] When he was worshipping. You remember, lastly, at that time in Acts chapter 13, it was when the church were gathered together praying, worshipping.

That this Holy Spirit moved and he said, set apart from me Saul and Barnabas to set them off. So what I'm saying to you is this. Worship is an incredibly important foundational occasion when God chooses to act.

For too many of us, worship is a routine. You go to church on Sunday. You attend church on Sunday. No, you don't. You participate in something fundamentally important at which God moves and acts.

Don't ever underestimate what you're doing on a Sunday morning and a Sunday evening as you're gathering here. God is intensely concerned about what we're doing right now.

He's meeting with us right now. And he is speaking to us, moving us, impacting us, changing us, and preparing us for whatever lies ahead in the coming week.

[13 : 11] You are doing business. That's what Charles Spurgeon said. When you're worshipping, he's saying, you are doing business with God. That's what we're doing tonight.

We're doing business with God. You're meeting face to face with God. Don't ever underestimate what God can do and will do as we worship him in spirit and in truth.

God moves. God's plans come to pass through worship. Number four. God's plans override our initial impressions.

You can see this right away because obviously the firstborn in the family is going to be the king.

That stands to reason. It was tradition. It was the done thing. It was what was expected. And after all, Eliab possessed all the qualities.

[14 : 14] Samuel's not wrong in saying, surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord because as far as he could see, Eliab ticked all the boxes.

He showed all the qualities and all the gifts that were necessary. And so he must have got something of a shock when God said to him, no, he's not the one I have chosen. Neither was the second.

Neither was the third or the fourth or the fifth or the sixth or the seventh. Against all of Samuel's expectations.

He had to ask if there was anyone left in Jesse's family. And it was the last. The one that they had not. Somebody didn't even know about him.

And he was the very one. The last one that Samuel had expected. So God's plans overrode Samuel's initial impressions.

[15 : 21] His natural expectations. Even his cultural tradition. And who knows, despite all I said this morning, and it's all true because it's biblical. We might have formulated.

We might have put a name to the quality. We might have said, well, I listened to that sermon this morning and I can think of. This choice of who I would fit into that category and who I would want to be the next minister.

You might be wrong. What's important is what God's choice is and how he moves you. And how he moves this congregation in their choice.

Fifth thing that strikes me about this chapter is that God's choice does not depend on our being in the right place at the right time.

Let me say that again. God's choice does not depend on our being in the right place at the right time. You've heard that phrase before, haven't you?

[16 : 31] You hear it often. I was in the right place at the right time. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. And that's how the world thinks, isn't it? That's how your buddies out there think and how very often we think.

Sometimes how we live. We think, you know, we think in terms of, well, you know, why are you in the job that you're in? Why are you in such a good job? Well, actually, I happened to be talking to this guy at a reception two years ago.

And he happened to be starting up a company that, and he wanted me, as we talked at this reception, he said he offered me a job.

And turns out that this company is now booming. And I'm now the assistant CEO. And I'm earning so many hundred thousands a year. But it's because I was in the right place at the right time.

Not necessarily because I am the very best in the country at what I do. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time. People talk like that all the time. I saw this. I came across this program quite recently, How to Break into the Elite.

[17 : 39] How to Break into the Elite. And the program, the whole point of this was that there is an elite in society. And if you're part of that elite, then everything's going to go well for you.

You're going to be successful. You're going to be rich. You're going to be in there with the in crowd. And all you need to do is to be part of the elite. And there's a certain amount of truth in that. It's always been like that.

If you go back in history, it's even worse. There were real elite in history with the aristocracy and the kind of people that the kings, that the monarchy in the centuries past, even in Scotland, would promote.

And they would give them titles and lands and all of that kind of thing. And this program was saying, well, the key to real success in life is how to break into the elite.

And you might watch a thing like that and think, yeah, you're right. Yeah, that's what I need. I need to be part of that. But, you know, as Christians, you don't need to be part of that. Because God is in control.

[18 : 44] And it doesn't matter about being in the right place at the right time or the wrong place at the wrong time. Because God is in control. If anyone was in the wrong place, it was David. Because he was way out with his father's sheep.

Hardly anybody knew. The youngest in the family was like, I mean, I know with six kids how the youngest is very often made to suffer.

Well, it was far worse in those days. Far, far worse in those days. The youngest didn't have any status whatsoever in the family. And yet he is the very person that God has chosen to be king over Israel.

He was in precisely the right place at precisely the right time. So, don't you worry about stuff like that. If you're trusting God, then God will see to it.

He will guide you. And he will lead you into all the right places. You don't need to worry about luck. You don't need to worry about other people's success.

[19 : 55] If other people are successful, that's fine. You need to be where God wants you to be. That's the most important place to be in all of life. Because life is about serving him.

And then, sixthly, God's plans involve his perfect preparation. His plans involve perfect preparation.

You would never think that the next king of Israel is a shepherd. You would expect him to be in the army, a young, promising soldier like Oliver Cromwell was during the English Civil War.

And he rose to power because he showed his leadership. And that's how he got to be commander. That's how he got to be the, got to the place where he was in the Commonwealth. That's normally how it happens, isn't it?

You show promise militarily if you want to be a king. You certainly wouldn't expect a king to come from the fields. But this is God's king.

[21 : 11] This is God's choice. It's God's man. Because Israel is God's people. And David is in the perfect place of preparation.

A place where, for a start, he cultivates a relationship of intimacy with God, of solitude with, you know, people, some people talk about the beauty and the joy of solitude.

Well, there's no joy of solitude by itself. But there is a place for being alone with God. And that comes across time and time again in the Scriptures.

That's what Jesus meant when he said, when you pray, go into your room, shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. In other words, there is an important place in the Christian life for private prayer, being alone with God.

Don't ever lose sight of that. And here, David, you can see through some of the Psalms that he wrote how God was relating to him and communing with him at that time in his life when it appeared as if nothing was happening.

[22 : 29] God's engaging with him, and he's learning more and more about God and how to serve God. He's also learning what it takes to lead sheep. And like I said this morning, the whole motif of the pastor or the overseer, the shepherd, is one which is the framework for the way in which God takes care lovingly of his people.

And so the shepherd who became king was a king who would lead and guide and care for God's people in gentleness and in righteousness and in goodness.

That's the kind of king that God wanted to be sovereign over his people. And then lastly, God's plans revolve around his ultimate plan.

We talk about God's plans, but actually God only has one plan, one will, and his will was that ultimately he would send the Messiah into the world, his own son, the second person of the Godhead who would enter into humanity, taking human nature to himself, and he would be born in Bethlehem.

He would grow up, and he would teach, and he would minister to people and perform miracles. He would ultimately be arrested. He would be tried.

[24 : 05] He would be condemned, and he would die on a Roman cross. But then three days later, he would rise triumphant over the grave. That was the plan of God.

But there's more to it than that. Because having risen triumphant over the grave from the dead, Jesus is then enthroned to a place where he is sovereign over his covenant people.

All those who have put their trust in him. He's their king. He's our king this evening. And here in the Old Testament, God is foreshadowing the kingship of Jesus with which he would reign in righteousness over his people by the kingship of David.

So God has a wonderful plan in mind. It's not just a national plan. It is a theological plan. It is an eternal plan.

And the kingship that was started here by David is one that would be displayed supremely by the Lord Jesus Christ in his triumph over death and in his heavenly reign in his love towards his people and in his rule over them.

[25 : 37] Tonight we are God's covenant people ruled over by King Jesus in his sovereignty, in his majesty, in his power, in his awesome splendor.

And one day we will see that for ourselves. One day we will get to see with our own eyes the Lamb who is on the throne, who once was slain, and who now is ruling as the Lion of the tribe of Israel.

We only know that by faith tonight. One day we will see him as he is in all his glory and his majesty.

Here in some small way, God is beginning to create this picture of the royal monarchy, which Jesus will ultimately fulfill as he rules over his people.

We are here to listen to him tonight, to worship him, to see him by faith, to receive his word, to go out of here to serve him as he prepares us to one day see him, to be with him.

[27 : 04] For to be with Christ is better by far. So even at this very early stage in the Old Testament, God is preparing all of these things.

Everything revolves around Jesus. Everything points to Jesus. And everything in this church needs to point to Jesus and revolve around him also. Ministry revolves around Jesus.

The message is about Jesus. Our worship is about Jesus in Jesus' name. Our witness is a witness to what Jesus has done. And we are here to serve the King of Kings.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you then for kingship, for that special kingship, for that unique rule and authority with which you govern your people in love and in care, for that shepherd, servant kingship.

We bow before you in your majesty this evening. We bow before you, Lord, because you are the perfection which David wasn't.

[28 : 15] Lord, you are everything that David's kingship looked forward to one day. And we ask, Lord, that we tonight might hear your voice and that we might be submissive to you, that we might come to you in faith and in worship, and that we might call upon your name and glorify you in our song, in our listening, and in our obedience.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen.